

Panajachel is a small town nestled by Lake Atitlán. The streets are alive with vendors selling “ropa típica” (traditional clothing), dolls, hats, hacky sacks, food, ice cream,

and other objects to tourists. It is a fun little town that Guatemalans and others like to visit during vacations. Here you can rent boats, go swimming, fish, and relax.

Chichicastenango is famous for its market place. There is a market here every weekend but the biggest market is during the first Sunday of every month. At this time, people from the neighboring villages come together to sell a variety of fruit and vegetables, spices, meat, dried fish, chickens, clothes, shoes, music, furniture, utensils, animals, wall hangings, blankets and many other things. The market begins at the church where women are selling candles and burning incense. The colors of the market are brilliant. The women in their bright colored outfits sell beautiful flowers, colorful fruit, and fabric. There is a lot to take in and a lot to buy.

In cities, the people generally wear Western-style clothing. However, the Indians of the rural areas have retained their traditional dress. Each groups’ clothing has its unique qualities that distinguish them from other villages and/or tribes, but the basic features include a *faja* (woven belt worn by both sexes), wrap-around skirts, shawls, and *huipiles* (colorfully woven blouses) for women, and knee- or calf-length trousers for the men. Women often wear ribbons or woolen fabric braided into their hair. Men generally wear a hat, usually made from straw or blocked felt. The skirts, pants, and blouses of the Indians are very colorful.

The extended family is the basis of society and exerts a major influence on an individual’s life and decisions. The father is the head of the family and takes the lead in conversations and decision making.

Tortillas are eaten with every meal. Other items that are common throughout Guatemala include black beans, rice, *tamales* and fried *platanos* with cream. Meats (beef, pork, and chicken) are often stewed, and sauces are important.

The most important sports are soccer, basketball, and volleyball. But recreation is most often enjoyed on holidays and during festivals throughout the year. Guatemala is noted for the *marimba*, a musical instrument made of wood and played with sticks padded with rubber. The *marimba* can be heard at many of the yearly festivals.

The Mayan empire flourished in what is now Guatemala for over one thousand years until it began to decline in the 1100s. From 1524 to 1821, Central America was ruled by the Spanish. As one of the chief centers of the Mayan culture, Guatemala abounds in archaeological ruins, notably the majestic ceremonial city of Tikal in the Petén region.

Government

Executive authority rests with the President. There is a one hundred-member legislature and an independent judiciary. All literate members of society must vote during elections, whereas non-literate members have the option.